DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 434 PS 023 780

AUTHOR Schlessman-Frost, Amy
TITLE Follow Through's Impact on Families and in Communities: Evaluation Findings and Parents' Perspectives. Roundtable Summary.
PUB DATE 15 Apr 93
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Atlanta, GA, April 12-16, 1993).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Development; Cognitive Development; *Disadvantaged Youth; Early Childhood Education; Lower Class Students; *Parent Participation; Program Effectiveness; *Transitional Programs; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS *Project Follow Through; Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the impact of Follow Through, a comprehensive program for low-income children in grades 1-3 and their parents previously enrolled in Head Start programs. The program was designed to help families make the transition from preschool to early elementary school. The paper notes that the longevity of Follow Through (over 25 years) is a unique aspect of the program and that working with Head Start children and parents provides a continuity and firm base which facilitates Follow Through's success. The paper also highlights some of the evaluative comments on projects representing varying Follow Through models. Parents in the Cognitive Enrichment Program (COGNET) reported that the program helped them better understand their children. Evaluation also showed that there were differences between parents involved in COGNET and those not involved. Differences were noted in how parents helped children with problems and what kinds of learning situations children experienced. The Cultural Linguistic Approach published a handbook on parent involvement. Evaluation of the Direct Instruction Model showed that parents felt that their children were receiving better academic instruction than students in any other approach. Contains 10 references. (JW)

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Follow Through's Impact on Families and in Communities: Evaluation Findings and Parents' Perspectives

Roundtable Summary

Amy Schlessman-Frost
The University of Arizona

Prepared for presentation at
the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association
Atlanta

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Follow Through's Impact on Families and in Communities: Evaluation Findings and Parents' Perspectives

Amy Schlessman-Frost
The University of Arizona
Roundtable Summary[1]

Brief Overview of Follow Through

During the 1992-93 academic year, Follow Through celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary as a federally sponsored compensatory education program. Follow Through serves low-income children in kindergarten through third grades who were previously enrolled in Head Start or similar quality preschool programs. Follow Through is a comprehensive program for families as they make the transition from preschool experiences to early elementary school. One of Follow Through's four major program goals is to "achieve active parent participation in the development, conduct, and overall direction of services to these children." For more information on Follow Through and the Follow Through models, see *Follow Through: A Bridge to the Future* (1992).

Follow Through's "Unique" Partnership[2]

During the process of review of the proposal for this presentation, one of the reviewers commented, "Many school reform efforts do address parent, school, community issues - with differing strategies and effects. What makes FT's model unique?...more effective in forging a partnership?"

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[1] For further detail of this presentation and Follow Through evaluations, contact TEEM Follow Through, College of Education, The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721

[2] The caveat to these responses is that they are a kind of "emic" perspective. Each interviewee is a participant in the Follow Through program.

Six of the eight sponsor directors interviewed mentioned Follow Through's 25 year history and longevity as a unique aspect of the program. Summaries of their comments follow:

> History of program has much to offer. The track record speaks for itself. FT has developed strategies for getting parents involved which may be of help to "newer" programs.
>
> Commitment over 25 years to families.
>
> Historically, FT hired community members as program aides. This was both radical and unique at the time. Precedents were set for educating parents with support for GED and parenting skills.

Another theme in responses was the relationship of Follow Through to Head Start.

> One big plus is inheriting parents from Head Start. They are already primed. Young inner-city (African-American) mothers are already geared, and our challenge is to keep them involved.
>
> We have programs in public schools that follow the model of Head Start. Parents participate initially as volunteers and often continue in positions as teacher aides or assistants.
>
> Children and parents who have participated in Head Start make a "beautiful transition" into the public schools. These parents are often "fragile" and FT helps build a relationship of trust with the school system.

Additional comments from Follow Through sponsor directors were:

Priority of family involvement is clear in the law. Law requires that parents sign-off on proposal; not aware of any other program that has such a stipulation.

Follow Through forms a three-way partnership among an external change agent - the model sponsor, the school and the community including families. This partnership long term relationship.

Follow Through is a comprehensive program including instructional, parent participation, and social services components.

Parents understand their role in their children's education better than parents in comparison groups. (Greenberg, 1992)

Selected Illustrative Evaluation Findings

All of the Follow Through Sponsors interviewed reported some form of evaluation of the parent participation component. The following illustrative evaluation findings were selected to represent each Follow Through model that had information to share for this paper. Two sponsors had data from the 1992-93 school year which were not yet analyzed.

Cognitive Enrichment Network (COGNET)

Katherine Greenberg reports on "COGNET Follow Through Impact on Parents" and "Differences Between Experimental and Control Parents" in her "COGNET Follow Through Research Report: Studies of Impact on Children, Teachers, and Parents, 1988 - 1991." In interviews, parents talked about COGNET's impact on their lives personally as well as on the

lives of their children. Parents stated that the program helped them understand their children and provided specific evaluations of curriculum materials (p. 12). Differences between families involved in the COGNET program and non-COGNET parents were evident in varying descriptions from parents of how they helped their children with problems and what kinds of new learning situations the children experienced (p. 14).

Cultural Linguistic Approach

This Follow Through model has published *Training Parents as Specialists: A Parent Involvement Handbook*. The handbook includes a section, "CLA Parents Volunteering and Loving It," written by the parents.

> Being a Parent Volunteer is being someone special to the children in our public school system. It's the joy of seeing their eyes light up and then once they get to know you...the closeness you develop once you win their confidence. I've been volunteering since 1984 and to me it is a privilege (sic) to help our children strive for success.
>
> I began volunteer work at Fuller School only because I hadn't anything. Same old things every day: watch soap operas and game shows and I enjoyed doing that! But, my first day as a volunteer changed me. ... I learned that by being at school with my children, they would do good, and I would learn along with them. ... The children are my future.

Direct Instruction Model

"Parents of students in the Direct Instruction Follow Through Program were interviewed by researchers from the Huron Institute (Haney, 1977). The parents of Direct Instruction students felt that their children were receiving better academic instruction than parents of students in any other approach" (Haddox, 1992, pp. 7-8).

Mathmagenic Activities Program

In a southern Afro-American urban community, 188 parents completed the 1991 end-of-the-year survey. Announcements of workshops were received by 84% of the parents and 38% attended the meetings. Parents ranked topics from most interesting to least interesting. The top three topics follow, three tied for second place ranking:

1) Information about your child's school program
2) Parenting skills
2) Discipline
2) Making different crafts
3) Drug Abuse

Classroom visits were made by 75% of the parents. Twenty-three percent of the parents volunteered in classrooms and 19% have served (or would consider serving on the PAC (Benson & White, 1992).

School Effectiveness Model

Preliminary reports of the parent survey include data from a northern urban, a rural Hispanic, and a northeastern urban community. The survey utilizes a five point Likert scale (5 "very happy" to 1"very unhappy) to allow parents to rate their level of satisfaction with their child's progress in reading, writing and spelling, math, study habits, and progress in school in general. Illustrative responses to the question level of satisfaction with your child's progress in school show:

In the northern urban community, at least 70% of parents for children in all grade levels (K-74%, 1st-79%, 2nd-93%, and 3rd-82%) chose 5 and 4, the top two positive rankings, on the scale. The most negative responses, 2 and 1, were not chosen by any of the respondents with children in second and third grades.

In the southwestern urban school, 91% of kindergarten parent respondents (85% return) were "very happy" with their child's progress in school. That top rating was chosen by 94% of 1st grade parents (84% return), 100% of 2nd grade parents (86% return), and 100% of 2nd grade parents (89% return).

Tucson Early Education Model (TEEM)

Recent evaluation of the parent participation component of the TEEM Follow Through model is reported in Schlessman-Frost's "Parents' perceptions of school's success in three Follow Through communities: A preliminary 'ethno' evaluation" (1992). Topics of inquiry include parent participants' views of what is important in education, their evaluations of school's success, and their perceptions of their own involvement in their children's education. These parents represent families involved in TEEM programs implemented in three cultures: Southwest urban multicultural, rural American Indian, and rural Appalachian. TEEM parents from these diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds value reading. In each community, families rank reading as a high educational priority, at home, and at school.

Concluding Comments

In her chapter "Two Decades of Early Childhood Intervention" in *The Intergenerational Transfer of Cognitive Skills: Volume 1: Programs, Policy, and Research Issues*, Alice Paul suggests, "Evidence also indicates that progress can best be made when the families of the children being served are included in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs for change" (1992, p. 39). It appears that the Follow Through model sponsors have learned this in their 25 years of working with families. Each sponsor interviewed reported some form of evaluation of its parent participation component. The voluntary nature of this investment in parent participation may be another "unique" characteristic of Follow Through partnerships.

Joyce Epstein has suggested that the 1990s research agenda for school and family partnerships should explore the education and training of educators and policy studies (1992). Follow Through's history and triadic partnerships potentially offer distinct contributions to the development of knowledge in both those areas.

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